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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, March 11, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "A BARGAIN IN CELERY." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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Here's another Friday-go-to-market day for the housewife. And here's news of a bargain on the market just now. Florida celery is plentiful and cheap at this season. So now is a good time to make the most of its flavor in soup, salads, meat stuffings, and various vegetable dishes.

From February to May the State of Florida ships about three-fourths of all the celery marketed. And this year the biggest celery crop in the history of the industry is predicted. The crop covers 8 thousand 400 acres and is expected to fill over 2 million 200 thousand crates. With an average of 6 dozen stalks to a crate, that brings the number of stalks of Florida celery expected to be marketed to over 150 million!

Shipments of this season's big crop will be adjusted more nearly to market needs under a Federal marketing agreement program developed by growers and shippers in cooperation with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. In addition the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation is buying for relief distribution part of the surplus supply which cannot be absorbed in out of State markets. This assistance to growers supplements the efforts the Florida celery industry is making to improve selling conditions under the marketing agreement program.

Celery is often considered a food luxury because the cost of production generally brings its price higher than many other vegetables. But right now celery belongs in the bargain class. Crates are selling in Florida at a dollar twenty-five to a dollar thirty-five which brings the F.O.B. price down to about 2 cents a stalk. Of course to this you must add handling and shipping costs, but your market can still afford to sell celery at a low figure at this time of the year.

Florida growers ship their celery in refrigerated freight cars and some by boat. The celery season started late this year because of the December freeze and other bad weather conditions in Florida so that up to the middle of February fewer carloads had been shipped than last year at the same time. But now that celery shipments have really gotten underway, it looks as if last year's record will be beaten.

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Around a dozen States are now growing celery in large enough amounts to ship in carlots. California has 3 celery-growing districts which produce crops at different seasons so California celery is on the market most of the year. At this season Florida and California are usually the only States competing in celery. But at this time of the year -- right now -- Florida has most of the market to herself. The late fall and winter California crop which competes with the Eastern late and storage crops has about finished going to market and the early California crop has not yet started moving in large enough amounts to offer serious competition to Florida.

As I said, the 3 districts in California manage to ship California celery most months of the year. But Florida and the northern celery States like New York, Michigan, and Oregon divide the year. The northern States ship celery in the late summer and fall while Florida ships in the winter and spring. Other States that ship some celery in carlots are Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

Much of the late fall crop of the northern States goes into storage and usually is sold before heavy shipments begin from Florida. And because stored celery keeps better without trimming, it usually goes into storage that way and is trimmed just before you see it at your grocery. But Florida and California celery is considerably trimmed before shipping, to save bulk and consequent expense in freight. Then, of course, it is often trimmed again just before it is set out for sale in your food market. The smaller size stalks are often trimmed down to the hearts and sold that way, and the "trimmings" sell largely to hotels and restaurants for soup.

Celery's chief claim to glory is its "appetite appeal." It also is a "good" source of calcium and rated as a "fair" source of vitamins B and C. But celery has flavor and crispness. The most popular way of serving it is raw, of course. It is delicious chopped up for salad. As for leaves and outside stalks, use them to flavor soups, sauces, and stuffings. Or you can use these less tender stalks for cooking. The French often quarter a bunch of celery and cook the quarters in beef broth until tender. They thicken the broth into gravy or "sauce" and serve it over the hot cooked celery. You can also cook celery in milk or in stewed tomatoes. If you cook celery in water, have a small amount of lightly salted water boiling before you drop the celery in. After the celery is tender, season it with butter or meat drippings, salt and pepper and serve. Or serve it with a white sauce.

As perhaps you know, celery has had U. S. Grades ever since 1922. These grades are not made up primarily for the housewife buying a stalk of celery for her family. They are for the shippers and carlot buyers, the wholesalers and retailers to help them in packing and selling. But the grades ultimately benefit the housewife shopper because they bring better and more standardized celery to market.

Here are a few tips about selecting celery. The chief defects to avoid are pithy branches and any indication of decay. Also, you can pull the outer branches back and look at the heart to see that it is well developed and young and tender.
